

Biblical Mt. Ararat: Two Identifications

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Abstract: The biblical Ararat, mountain of landing of Noah's Ark has two general identifications in the Armenian Highland: Mountain of Corduena (modern Cudi dağı) and Masis (Ararat, Ağrı dağı), situated respectively in the extreme south-east and extreme north-east of modern Turkey). The ancient sources actualized the first localization. Since the 12th century the second became more and more popular. The paper deals with the myths and legends associated with those mountains and the history of identification of the biblical Ararat.

Ararat, the mountain of the landing of Noah's Ark, has been identified in various locations, but up until now two main candidates persist: the mountain of Corduena and Masis. In the Hebrew Bible (Masoretic text) the mountains are called 'Arārāt, in the Greek translation (Septuagint) – Ararat, in Chaldean and Syrian (Peshitta) – Qardū, in Arabic – Qarda, and in Latin – “Mountains of Armenia”. Ararat is believed to be the Greek version of Hebrew 'RRT, i.e. Urartu (Piotrovsky 1944: 29; 1969: 13; Inglizian 1947: 5 ff., 63 ff; Musheghyan 2003: 4 ff.: Salvini and Salvini 2003; Marinković 2012). On the other hand, Ararat is almost identical to the Armenian term Ayrarat – the name of the central province of Armenia, with Mt. Masis at its center. However, Urartu and Ayrarat are two different geographical concepts. Ayrarat is the Armenian name of the region, which in Urartian sources is referred to as the land of Etiuni or Etiuhi (in the north of Urartu).

Ararat, Ararad, Sararad, Ararat of Corduena, mountain of Corduena are the ancient Armenian appellations of the mountain in the province of Korčayk'/Korduk' (Kordyēnē, Gordiēnē in Greek; Corduena in Latin), in the south of the Armenian Highland / Northern Mesopotamia. In ancient Assyrian sources it is referred to as Nibur / Nipur (in this region the Assyrians mention also Mt. Arardi, see Harutyunyan 1985: 31). Its modern name Ĵudi (Ĵebel Ĵudi in Arabic; Cudi dağı in Turkish) goes back to the Quran, where it is the name of the Mountain of the Ark (possibly a corrupted version of Korduk' / Corduena). It has several peaks, and its height is 2089 m. Notwithstanding the relatively modest height of the mountain, its top is covered with snow most of the year. In many of the ancient Middle Eastern traditions, this mountain appears as a sacred centre, a site of the localization of myths of Creation – cosmogony and anthropogony – and a border between this and the Other worlds.

It is with this mountain that the earliest and authoritative sources – Berossus (c. 275 BC), Samaritan Pentateuch (dated back to the 5th century BC, with its most ancient manuscripts from the 10th century AD), three Aramaic renderings of the Bible (Targum), Josephus Flavius (1st century AD), Hippolytus (2nd century), Eusebius (3rd century), Epiphanius (4th century), the Syrian translation of the Bible (Peshitta), ancient Armenian authors Pavstos Buzand, Movses Khorenatsi, Tovma Artsruni, *et al.* (starting from the 5th century AD), Arabic authors Al Masudi, Ibn Hawqal (10th century), *et al.* – associate Noah's Ark myth with. Many Armenian, Syrian and Arabic legends identify the haven of Noah's Ark with this mountain too. A number of sanctuaries have been erected here, including the Nestorian "Monastery of the Ark". Even today the peoples of various confessions get together at the mountain to celebrate Noah's sacrifice.

According to the Armenian ethnogenic myth, known from the book of "the father of Armenian historiography", Movses Khorenatsi (I.10), and from the anonymous author of the first chapter of Sebeos' *History* (Thomson 1978: 77 f.; 83 ff.; 357 ff.), Armenia was created by the mythic patriarch Hayk, eponymous forefather of the Armenians. After Babel, Hayk, accompanied by his extensive family, heads north from Babylon, to "the land of Ararat", where he settles for a short period at the bottom of a mountain (i.e. the mountain of Corduena). Leaving this land to his grandson Kadmos he moves on to north-west and settles down in the north of Lake Van. Kadmos is the eponym of the ancient country of Kadmuhi/Katmuhu, in the north of present day mountains Tūr-Abdin, known from the cuneiform sources of the 2nd-1st millennia BC (Postgate 1980). According to Assyrian data, the mountain of Corduena (Nibur / Nipur in Assyrian) was situated at the eastern border of this country (Harutyunyan 1985: 150-151).

Khorenatsi (I. 6) also introduces the legend about the first inhabitants of Armenia who settled down here before Hayk. Xisuthrus' (Noah's) son, Sem, from the landing place of his father heads north-west and settles down in the province of Tarawn (region of Muš, Turk. Muş). In Khorenatsi's historical system, Hayk repeats Sem's journey, thus Ararat is identified with the mountain of Corduena.

Hayk, forefather of Armenia, is here put in parallel with Noah, forefather of humanity. Accordingly, Hayk's three sons, eponyms of Armenian provinces, parallel with Noah's three sons, eponyms of different groups of humanity. It is noteworthy that the name Kadmuhi ('Kadmian /region/'in Hurrian) parallels the name of the first man in the mystical tradition of Judaism 'Ādām qadmōn, cf. *qdm* in Western Semitic – 'first, ancient' (for this character, see Averintsev 1980: 43-44). This leads to the assumption that this region, inhabited by the West Semitic and Hurrian tribes, since the early times was considered the cradle of humanity. In Armenian tradition, Western-Semitic 'first man' was, it seems, identified with the Greek Kadmos, which apparently had Western-Semitic origins too (for the Armenian Kadmos, see A. Petrosyan 1997: 154-156, with bibliography).

Urartu is the Assyrian name of the country that occupied almost the whole of the Armenian Highland in the 9th-8th centuries BC (in Urartian sources the country is

called Biainili). This name is believed to go back to more ancient Assyrian forms of Uruaṭri/u and Uraṭri, a attested to in the 13th and 10th centuries BC, respectively. These were the names attributed to the countries in the vicinity of the mountain of Corduena (cf. also ‘WRRṬ, i.e., ‘Urārāt in the Dead Sea Scrolls) (Harutyunyan 1970: 17; Khachikyan 1985: 134, n. 16). Urartu originated in this region, which is in correspondence with the identification of the Hebrew “Mountains of RRṬ (Urartu)” with the mountain of Corduena.

The area around the mountain of Corduena / Nibur was known in Assyrian sources as the country of Kumme/i, while in Urartian ones as Qumenu. The country was the center of the cult of the Hurro-Urartian thunder god Teššub / Teišeba (for the localization and cult of this land, see Diakonoff and Kashkay 1981: 70; Diakonoff 1981: 82; Harutyunyan 1985: 119-122; Radner 2012: 254-257). Assyrian sources mention several towns at the top of the mountain. According to the Annals of Adad-nerari II, the Assyrians, who came to the rescue of the town of Kumme in 895 BC, made sacrifices here to “Adad of Kumme”, i.e., Teššub / Teišeba.

Mythical notions related to this mountain can be traced back to the earliest historical times – the Sumerian period. The Assyrian name Nipur / Nibur in northern Mesopotamia is related to the Akkadian name of the center of chief god Enlil, Nippur (Sumer. Nibru), in southern Mesopotamia (logographically recorded as EN.LÍL^{KI} ‘Enlil City’). In the Sumerian variant of the myth of the Flood, it is Enlil’s rage that threatens to destroy humanity.

Ancient Semitic people considered the south of the Armenian Highland and its mountains to be lands and mountains of the night / dark, located on the route to heaven or the land of immortality. It is said in Talmud that the Gehenna is on the other side of the land of the dark; and in Judaic legends, Alexander the Great, in search of immortality, comes to Armenia, to the dark mountains. Enoch on his way to heaven reaches the dark lands and sees the “mountains of darkness”. In a letter included in the Greek novel about Alexander, the hero, in search of immortality, comes to Armenia and, passing through the “land of darkness”, finds the source of life (Lipiński 1971: 41 ff.).

The oldest source of this concept is the Akkadian variant of the epic of Gilgameš (Alexander assumed the traits of this hero). Gilgameš, in search of immortality, reaches Mt. Māšu ‘Twin’, which is protected by “scorpion-men”. In complete darkness he follows the road for 12 “double hours”, to be able to reach Utnapišti (Noah’s prototype). The name of the mountain Utnapišti’s ark lands on is read as Nišir or Nimuš. This is evidently a mythical, cosmological center. On the other hand, however, like in other similar cases, it could also be identified with a real mountain, with there being the possibility of multiple identifications. Nišir / Nimuš is usually identified with modern Pir Omar Gudrun/ Pir-i-Mukurun to the east of the Tigris, in the Lesser Zab basin, much further to the south of the mountain of Corduena (Diakonoff 1961: 206; George 2003: 224); there is an opinion, however, that this mountain can also be localized in Corduena (see, e.g., EI 2: 574; A. Mushegyan 2003: 10, n. 23). Remarkably, a central role in the creation of the flood

is attributed to Adad, the Akkadian god of thunder, while “Adad of Kumme” (=Teššub / Teišeba) is the god of the mountain of Corduena. As for Mt. Māšu, it parallels the above-mentioned mountains of the dark in the Armenian Highland. It is usually identified with the mountains of Țur-Abdin to the east of the mountain of Corduena, which in classical sources are referred to as Masion oros / Mons Masius (Lehmann-Haupt 1926: 421 ff.; Inglizian 1947: 119 ff.). Ancient authors were not thoroughly familiar with the geography of the Armenian Highland, and, according to some data, Masius can be identified with the mountain of Corduena (Inglizian 1947: 98-99). Parenthetically, some contemporary Western experts do not differentiate between Armenian Masis and Masius / Țur-Abdin either (Gaster 1975: 198; Lipiński, 1971: 47-49).

An Ugaritic mythological text (the 14th-13th centuries BC) mentions the “twin peaks” of the entrance to the Other world – Targhuzizza and Tharumegi (or: Targhu/izziza and Sharrumagi, see Gaster 1975: 197-198; ANET: 35). This western Semitic conception is inseparable from the Akkadian “twin” Mt. Māšu. On the other hand, however, the Indo-European influence is evident here too. These names must be related to the Anatolian name of the thunder god, Tarhu- (it appears as Tark/gu- in some theophoric names) and his son, Šarruma, the deity of mountains. Demonstrably, the thunder god of the region (Baal, Teššub) is depicted standing on two (twin) peaks (Dijkstra 1991). In actual geography, the first of these peaks can be theoretically juxtaposed with the religious center of the thunder god on Mt. Nibur (possibly in the “royal city” of Kibša of the country of Kumme), and the second with the city of Šarum. According to the Assyrian text, both of these cities were situated “on the pointed peaks of Mt. Nibur” (for the localization of these towns, see Harutyunyan 1985: 108, 239-240).

According to B. Lincoln, the central characters of the Indo-European cosmo- and anthropogonic myths were two brothers: *Manu- ‘Man’, the forefather of humanity, and his brother *Yemo- ‘Twin’. ‘Man’ sacrifices an ox and ‘Twin’, and the material universe and the human society are created from the parts of their bodies (Lincoln 1975; 1986: 69 ff.). Mt. Māšu ‘Twin’ in the Indo-European traditions could be juxtaposed with *Yemo-. Accordingly, the sacrificial ox could be juxtaposed with *Taurus* ‘Ox’, ancient Greek name of some massifs of the Armenian Highland. The ox is the symbol of the thunder god in ancient Northern Mesopotamian and Indo-European traditions, including Teššub (Ivanov MNM 1: 203; Schwemer 2007: 138; 2008: 6, 34 f.), the god of the mountain of Corduena.

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Masis, the highest mountain of the Armenian Highland (5,137 m) covered with eternal snow is one of the main symbols of Armenian identity. In modern European languages it is called Ararat and Ağrı dağı in Turkish. It has become unequivocally associated with the Flood myth since the 12th century (H. Petrosyan 2002; 2007). According to Khorenatsi (I. 30), it was on the eastern slope of this “great mountain” that the legendary king Tigran settled Anoyš, the wife of the Median king Aždahak, defeated and murdered by him, and her descendants, together with numerous

captives. Aždahak originates from the Iranian Aži Dahāka, the name of the mythical Snake, the rival of the hero Ɖraētaona.

Aždahak's descendants are called *višapazuns* 'descendants of Višaps', i.e., 'Dragonids'. Višap-dragons are opposed to the spirits-*k'ajšs*, yet are in many ways equivalent to them (for the višaps and *k'ajšs* see A. Petrosyan 2010a). According to the legends, the *k'ajšs* keep King Artawazd (Tigran's descendant) enchained in a cave on the Mt. Masis. Two dogs gnaw his chains, and he strives to free himself to put an end to the world. Artawazd himself is considered a modification of the Višap-dragon. The closest parallels to the story of Artawazd are the Armenian and Caucasian myths about chained or captive heroes: Armenian Mher the Younger, Georgian Amirani, Abkhazian Abrskil, et al. (for the myth of Artawazd, see A. Petrosyan 2002: 112 ff., with bibliography). In ancient Armenian tradition this is the main myth related to Masis.

Two-headed Masis could very likely be conceived as "the twin mountain" and, hence, juxtaposed with Māšu. In Armenian folklore, Masis is referred to as "the Black mountain" and "the Dark land" (Abeghian 1966: 136), which could obviously be put in parallel with Gilgameš's journey in darkness after reaching Mt. Māšu and "the mountain / land of the dark" in other ancient Semitic sources.

Khorenatsi (I. 12) calls Masis *aregaknačem* 'where the sun walks', while, on Mt. Māšu, scorpion-men guarded the sunrise and sunset. The archaic prototype of Artawazd, as well as of similar Caucasian heroes, could have solar characteristics. Typically, one such Armenian hero, Mher the Younger, bears the name of the Iranian solar deity, Mihr (Mher < Mihr < Mithra, cf. also the likely connection of the name of the Georgian hero Amirani with this theonym). In Armenian pre-Christian religion, *k'ajš* is the epithet of the god Vahagn, who also had the traits of the sun god (A. Petrosyan 2007: 181-182, with bibliography). Vahagn was evidently the first of the *k'ajšs* as well as their chief. Accordingly, Masis, as the dwelling place of the *k'ajšs*, again links up with the sun, just as Māšu does. To a certain degree, the characters of the scorpion-men of mountain Māšu and the višaps and *k'ajšs* of Masis are comparable too. So, both Māšu and Masis are typical "world mountains" reaching the sky above and the underworld below (H. Petrosyan 2002: 36-37). According to Khorenatsi, the name Masis goes back to Amasia, Hayk's grandson, while Anonym mentions Marseak (Abraham's domestic slave, who ran away from Isaac and settled down in Armenia) as the eponym of the mountain. Both of the views are typical examples of "popular etymology" and are linguistically unacceptable.

Masis / Masik' (Maseac' in the genitive case) are plural forms; the nominative single is Masi < *Masiā, with the suffix *-i(y)ā. Before the drop of the last vowel (i.e., before the first centuries AD) the name should have been in the form of Masía. Evidently, this name is inseparable from the Akkadian Māšu. In the Assyrian version of the Akkadian language, Māšu sounded Māsu. With the Indo-European productive suffix *iyo-/ iyā, is was rather common in the Armenian toponyms,

Assyr. Māsu would regularly transform into *Masio- / *Masia (the last vowel of the root before this suffix falls out).

Māšu, as previously mentioned, is identified with the mountains Masios / Masius (Tūr-Abdin), which are almost identical to Armenian Masis. These are likely to be the Greek-Latin versions of early Arm. Masio / Masia. The second peak in the Armenian Highland Sip'an/ Cipan (Süphan in Turkish; situated to the north of Lake Van) is also called Masik'. Characteristically, Sip'an is also of apparently ancient Semitic origin (cf. Şapanu, the mountain of the god Ba'al in Syria). Syrian and Mesopotamian names, thus, throughout time moved to the north, becoming identified with major mountains in the Armenian Highland¹.

It is difficult to trace the specifically Armenian myth about the Flood in the ancient Armenian tradition. However, Khorenatsi (I. 6) refers to Sybil of Berossus and to a certain Olimpiadorus, who told to his audience in Greece of a long-lost book, which recounted that Xistutrus' (Noah's) son, Sem, headed north-west and reached Mt. Sim in the province of Tarawn. Khorenatsi notices next that it is "the elderly of the Aramian tribe" (Armenians) that most often speak of this. Josephus Flavius (Ant. Jud., II. 3. 5) writes of the harbour of the Ark in Armenia: "the Armenians call this place the Place of Descent" and the remains of the Ark "are shown there by the inhabitants to this day".

In ancient times, the Armenians, thus, used to tell certain legends relating to the flood. Nevertheless, as we have seen, in those legends, Sem heads north-west; Noah's mountain, hence, was to the south-east of the province of Tarawn, i.e., it coincides with the mountain of Corduena; Josephus Flavius, immediately after the cited lines, quotes a passage from Berossus relating to the Ark on the mountain of Corduena.

Both Western and Armenian experts mention that in Armenian reality Masis has come to be identified with the mountain of Noah's Ark since 11th-12th centuries (Gelzer, Weber, Hübschmann, Abeghian, Inglizian, *et al.*). These scholars were familiar with the work of Hieronymus, who identifies Ararat with Masis (see below), however they believed that this identification was not known or was not actualized in Armenia (the question was first addressed in Gelzer 1897: 6 ff.).

Below are the arguments put forward by the proponents of the ancient identification of the mountain of Noah's Ark with Masis (these arguments are summarised in Mushegyan 2003).

St. Hieronymus (Jerome) in his Bible commentaries (Comm. in Isaïam, 37, 38), written in about 400 AD, tells that the mountain of Noah' Ark is the highest in the Taurus mountain range of Armenia, in the fertile province of Ararat, where the river

¹ For this etymology of Masis, see A. Petrosyan 2002: 18-19, n. 54 (Masis had long been compared with Māšu, with no linguistic explanations, however, see Inglizian 1947: 96 ff., 119 ff.). Masis is also considered to be an Iranian borrowing (P. Uslar), but the above dismisses this suggestion (cf. Russell 1985: 455-456, where he presents the Iranian etymology with no reference to his predecessor and not even with a single reference to the Akkadian Māšu).

Araxes flows. It is, doubtlessly, Masis, in the province of Ayrarat, close to the river Araxes (Mushegyan 2003: 30 ff, with bibliography).

In an excerpt by Vardan Areveltsi, an author of the 12th century, which, according to Levon Khachikyan, traces back to the author of the 5th century, Eghishe, the biblical Ararat is argued to be Masis rather than the mountain of Corduena (L. Khachikyan 1992: 245). Other arguments are also existent, but they are all controversial (Movsisyan 2000: 48-52).

The following can be added to what has already been mentioned. In the Syrian translation of the novel about Alexander (but not in the Greek original), before reaching the “country of the dark”, the hero reaches Mt. Masîs. The translation dates back to 6th-10th centuries (the most likely date is the end of 6th century). This mountain is identified both with Masis and with Masius / Tur-Abdin (see, e.g., Inglizian 1947: 120-122; Lipiński 1971: 47, n. 172). Nevertheless, the name Masîs is identical to Masis.

All studies usually focused on written sources, their authenticity and potential interpretations. But this is, essentially, a problem of folklore (mythology). Folklore is a sum of diverse variants, and the folklore identifications are equivocal. It is largely thought that Hieronymus' work was not known to Armenian authors. Where does this identification, then, come from? It is obvious that the biblical name Ararat, regardless of its origin, could easily be identified with the Armenian Ayrarat, the central province of Armenia, which was, in a sense, synonymous with Armenia itself. Nobody doubted that the biblical Ararat is in Armenia – in the Greek, Latin and Armenian translations of the Bible Ararat is occasionally replaced by Armenia. The identification of the biblical Ararat with the main mountain of the province of Ayrarat, as a result, inevitably suggests itself. Masis, as the “world mountain”, must have been considered the center of universe, and thus the center of Creation, cosmogony and anthropogony, while Noah's narrative is the second cosmogony and anthropogony of the Bible. It is hard to imagine that the simple Christians in the central parts of Armenia, where Masis can be seen, would not identify the biblical mountain with the highest and most beautiful mountain in Armenia and entire Near East.

The question is, I believe, that the enucleation of the Truth – the sole Christian truth – was a pressing issue for the ancient authors. These authors were all clerics. Educated clerics could have their point of view on the haven of Noah's Ark. They were not interested in local popular culture and tried to state the truth, while the truth could only be found in what was written in the Holy Book and in the works of the Church Fathers they were acquainted with. Remarkably, Khorenatsi, the first author whose *History* accurately, word for word fixes several examples of ancient Armenian folklore, remarks that many of these myths and legends are introduced solely upon the wish of his patron, prince Smbat Bagratuni. It may also be recalled that the first written record of the great Armenian epic “Daredevils of Sasun” was made in 1873, when the days of the epic reached their end, while evidence of earlier

versions of the epic appear in foreign sources of the 12th-16th centuries (pseudo-Waqidi, Sharaf-khan, A. Teneyro and M. Afonso).

I have encountered a similar situation when having taken up a position at the Folklore department of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia. The specialists working there would mainly write down the archaic or the so-to-say outmoded ethnographical popular examples of folklore – fairy tales, legends, epic stories and songs. Living, up-to-date anecdotes, jokes and contemporary children’s folklore were almost of no interest to them. In a sense, they did not notice them. The Soviet Armenian folklorists clearly looked for examples of “true national culture”, consecrated by time (for the drawbacks of the Soviet folkloristics, see, e.g., Belousov et al. 2005: 217). Christian authors, likewise, were not interested in the popular culture. All they needed was the sole Christian truth.

The name Masis has been recorded since the birth of Armenian written language in the 5th century; the verses cited by Khorenatsi from the myth of Artawazd, where the name Masis appears, are much older and trace back to earlier, pagan times (the historical Artawazds of the Artaxiad dynasty ruled in the 2nd-1st centuries BC).

The juxtaposition of Masis with the Akkadian Māšu might have occurred in more ancient past. The Armenian Highland had ancient ties with Mesopotamia, archeologically recorded from the 6th millennium BC. There were Mesopotamian colonies here in the 4th millennium BC. The bearers of the Kuro-Araxes Early Bronze culture made their appearance in Syria and Mesopotamia at the dawn of the 3rd millennium BC. In the second half of the 3rd millennium, the Akkadian kings conquered several south-western regions of the Armenian Highland. In the 2nd-1st millenniums BC, especially in the Urartian period, strong Assyrian influence was prevailing here. The name Masis, as already mentioned, could have originated from the Assyrian pronunciation of Māšu.

Obviously, Māšu is a mythical place of inexact location (for the earthly localizations of this mountain, see, e.g., Tigay 2002: 77-78). However, why was the great mountain of Akkadian myth called “Twin”? The great two-peaked mountain of distant Armenian Highland was known to the ancient inhabitants of Mesopotamia; some of them had even seen it. Could one, then, dismiss the possibility that Masis became the prototype of the mythical twin mountain Māšu? The match between the two-peaked mountain and the mountain with the twin myth suggests itself (for Masis, as a place of localization of the twin myth, see A. Petrosyan 2008: 165-166). It is noteworthy in this respect that the land on the northern slopes of Masis in Urartian sources is referred to as Erkuahi / Erekuahi (for this land, see Diakonoff and Kashkai 1981: 32; Harutyunyan 1985: 260-261; KUKN: 504-505; Özfirat 2010: 528), i.e., ‘Erkua-ian country’, which could have been related to the Armenian word

erku ‘two’². If this is the case, Assyrian *Māsu* – ‘twin’ – is the translation of the local synonymous name.

As to the identification of Masis with the biblical Ararat, this could have occurred among the Jewish population of Armenian cities, which was considerable from the times of Tigran the Great (1st century BC) up to early Christianity. This identification could have received new impulses with the emergence of the first Christians in the first centuries AD and particularly after the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of Armenia in the early 4th century. Nevertheless, ancient local myths about Masis remained prevalent; biblical matching was controversial and not universally accepted and had no supporters among the educated clerics. It is only at the dawn of the 2nd millennium AD that the identification of Ararat with Masis became popular. Among the reasons that led to an unequivocal identification were the fading of the ancient (pagan) traditions, which accelerated after the loss of statehood in the 11th century, and the considerable immigration of the population of the region neighboring Mt. Masis following it.

Masis, thus, became the meeting point of two traditions – of the Flood and of the hero chained in the mountains; the former is related to the south, Mesopotamia, while the latter is concentrated in the Armenian Highland and the Caucasus.

² For the Armenian elements in Uartian language and onomastics, see, e.g., Djahukian 1988; 1992; Diakonoff 1985: 602-603; 1992; A. Petrosyan 2010b, with bibliography; for this region, as the center of the Armenian speaking groups: Petrosyan 2007: 49-54.

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